Lincolns Religion.

Lecture by Lincolns Law partner Wm H. Herndon, delivered at Springfield Ill. about Dec 1873 in old County Court House on East side square to an audience of less than three dozen persons. Afterwards published as supplement to the Illinois State Register.

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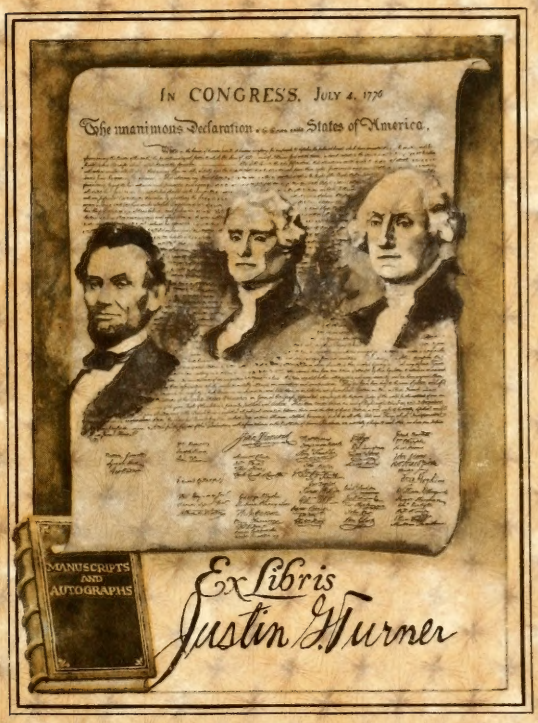
The books, and your capacity for understanding them, are just the same in all places.

A. Lincoln

WILLIAM H. TOWNSEND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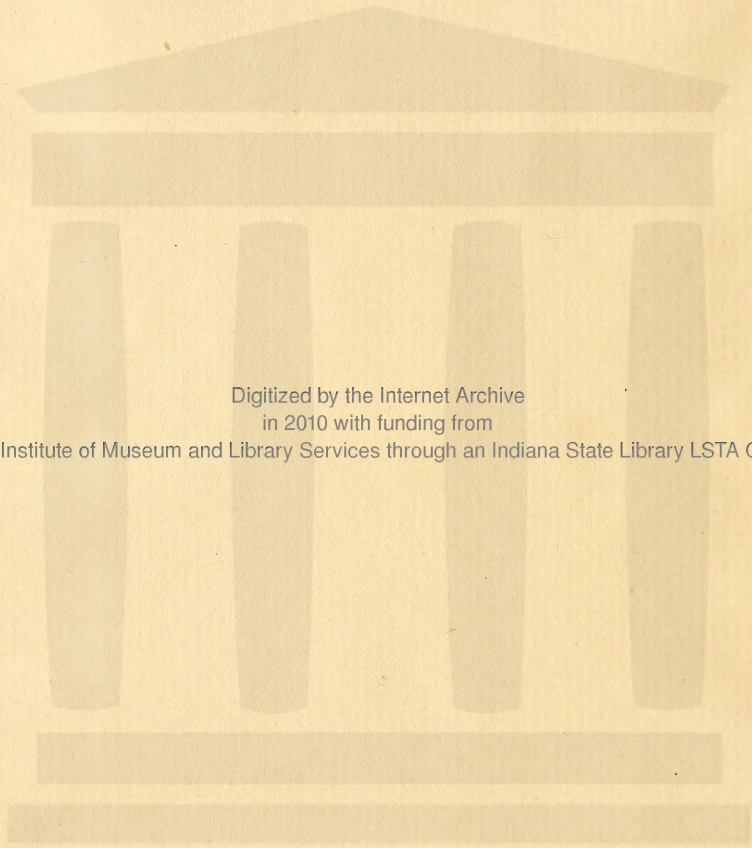

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State Register.
SUPPLEMENT.

LINCOLN'S RELIGION.

BY W. H. HERNDON.

It is with no little misgivings that I appear before you to-night in this hall of justice to deliver you a lecture on Mr. Lincoln's "Later Life and Religious Sentiments," in answer to a lecture delivered here by the Rev. James A. Reed, of this city, some time since. I shall not weary you with the length of the lecture, and I hope not to tire you with figures and facts. I ask your kind indulgence while I speak to your reason to establish the truth of this controversy between those who hold that Mr. Lincoln was an unbeliever and those who hold that he died a Christian. If I fail to establish my point, it will be because of the manner and method of presenting the facts. I shall review the evidences of Mr. Reed, and introduce some new proofs—not, by any means, exhaustive of the subject. I think I could state facts about Mr. Lincoln's jokes on and gibes at Christianity and committees of ministers, who waited on him while President of the United States, and before, that would shock a Christian people.

There are two classes or kinds of minds in the world. One of those classes is credulous, trustful and reverent, blooming into hero worship—never thinking, ever admiring. The other class is thoughtful, doubting, hesitating, forever investigating—blooming and fruiting into truth worship. The hero worshipping class exalts a fool, a knave or a villain into a hero. The truth worshipping class exalts a man only after thorough and searching investigation, and tears down the fool, the knave or villain speedily, without regret. The first class writes romantic biographies. The second class writes the truth. Holland's life of Lincoln is fictitious, romantic, false. The second class states facts, truths, realities. Lamon's life of Lincoln, so far as it goes, is an example of the second class. The hero worshipping class has formed more than its quota or share of biographical literature. Mr. Lincoln saw and felt this. I once loaned him a biography of one of the worthies of this world, and on returning it to me he said: "Why don't they have general blank biographies in all the book stores of the United States to suit purchasers, so that when a man dies all that his heirs, friends or admirers will have to do will be to fill up the blanks—so much alike do all those biographies read to me." The question is—shall Mr. Lincoln's expression—suggestion—be carried into execution? Have general blank lives to sell in all the book stores in the Union, to suit purchasers, or shall we go contrary, erect a new and genuine standard of biographical literature, and have honest, truthful and permanent biographical facts? For one, I am determined to state the facts of Mr. Lincoln's life, so far as I know them, including his religious ideas and views. Holland, when he wrote Lincoln's life, thought he would forestall all thought, research, and investigation—thought he would hush up and smother out all expression from all sources as to Mr. Lincoln's religion. "O, never mind, I'll fix that," did not do him any good. He failed; for resolute men were determined to have the truth out—fully, clearly, unmistakably.

These thoughts have been suggested, if not caused, by reading Holland's life of Lincoln, Lamon's life of Lincoln, Holland's review of the same in Scribner's Monthly for August, 1872, and a lecture by the Rev. James A. Reed, of the city of Springfield, Illinois—"defender of the faith" of Lincoln, as he was loudly and clamorously hailed by tongue and press on reaching St. Paul during his recent Christian pleasure trip to Minnesota. I shall not now and here mention Holland—his biography—except to say, that when he and Mr. Reed assert that I am one of the authors of Lamon's life of Lincoln, they and each of them state a falsehood—knowingly and wilfully, I believe. I am not one of the authors of Lamon's life of Lincoln. I never wrote a chapter, a paragraph, a sentence or a word for the biography. Lamon quotes me as authority, and that is all I am responsible for. I shall not notice Lamon, his biography, or Holland's review of the same. I shall turn my attention to the most Reverend James A. Reed, "defender of the faith" of Honest Abe. His lecture will be found in Scribner's Monthly for July, 1873. When a man enters the field of criticism, with iron pen in hand, moved by no admixture of heart, he should be complete master of the subject he proposes to tear down. Anything short of this is folly, if not a fraud on the reading world. To assert what one does not know to be true is a fraud, and is so held in morals as well as in law. The reverend gentleman has entered the field of criticism. He, on short acquaintance with the facts and in the absence of the records, boldly comes forward as "the defender of the Christian faith of Lincoln." It would have been well for him to have studied the facts more thoroughly.

I started out in the Abbott letter, in 1870, with the proposition that Mr. Lincoln was simply a Theist—an unbeliever in Christianity. I am met by the Christian ministers and pulpit of the land with the assertion that Mr. Lincoln had "religious sentiments"—"many Christian sentiments."

Mr. Reed's lecture is headed carefully, cautiously thus: "The Later Life and Religious Sentiments of Abraham Lincoln." I have never said that Mr. Lincoln had no religious sentiments—no Christian sentiments. On the contrary, I admitted then and do now, that Mr. Lincoln had religious opinions, ideas and sentiments, but the declaration that Mr. Lincoln had religious sentiments does not meet the proposition that Mr. Lincoln died a Theist—an infidel, especially in the orthodox sense of the term. Much "believing," "much hearsay," "many convictions," "many changes of heart," much twaddle is adduced to show that Mr. Lincoln was a Christian. Proclamations of Mr. Lincoln, while President of the United States, are quoted to show that he was a Christian. Mr. Lincoln was the President of a Christian people, and he used their ideas, language, speech and forms. So would Tom Paine have done had he been President of this free people. I am met with the assertion that if Mr. Lincoln had lived he would have become an evangelical Christian. No one knows that; it is mere speculation, mere guessing. Again, I am met with the assertion that Mr. Lincoln's addresses at Bible and Sunday school societies were eminently Christian. When a man is invited to address such societies it is implied, unless the man reserves the right to say what he pleases, that he confine himself to their ideas, notions, feelings and philosophy. To do otherwise would be an insult and an outrage on the society. No doubt that Mr. Lincoln used polite, courteous general language on such occasions, from which Christian inferences might be drawn. Lincoln was very politic, and a very shrewd man in some particulars. When he was talking to a Christian, he adapted himself to the Christian. When he spoke to or joked with one of his own kind, he was indecently vulgar. Hence the different opinions about Mr. Lincoln's Christianity and vulgarity. Mr. Lincoln was chaste in his ideas and language when it was necessary, and when not so he was vulgar in his jokes and stories; he was at moments, as it were, a Christian, through politeness, courtesy, or good breeding toward the delicate, tender-nerved man, the Christian, and in two minutes after, in the absence of such men, and among his own kind, the same old unbeliever. I have witnessed this for a thousand times. This conduct of Mr. Lincoln was not hypocritical, but sprang from a high and tender regard for the feelings of men.

How few people there are in the world who fully understand the broad distinction between Religion and Christianity. *Religion* is the universal worshipping element in the whole race of man; it belongs to the whole of the race; it is the general, the universal attribute of man. *Christianity* is but a special form of the universal worship; it is local, Jewish, and not the human universal. It is not as broad, nor as deep, nor as mountain-high as religion. Sift the errors out of the New Testament, as well as the Old—eliminate what is local and Jewish therein—and you have the universal, the eternal religion. What is left—religion—is older than Moses, older than the Egyptian and Indian empires: as old as the race of man.

When men speak of Lincoln's religious sentiments they call them his Christian sentiments, and confound one with the other. I have often and often said that Mr. Lincoln was, by nature, a deeply religious man, and I now repeat it. I have often said he was not a Christian, and I now repeat it. He was not an unbeliever in *religion*, but was as to *Christianity*. Mr. Lincoln was a Theist, as I said in my Abbott letter. A Theist does not necessarily deny Revelation. The universal reason—the reason of the whole race of man—is the highest tribunal, the grandest tribunal, this side the Throne. It is the only test of truth, and the only true guide for the conduct of men. I may err—do often err. So may the Rev. James Reed; so may the Jewish people; but the whole race of men never err. The universal reason is infallible. Christianity, in its local and Jewish phases, may err, and is fallible. Keeping the issues between Mr. Reed and myself in the mind, and holding on to the difference between religion and Christianity, will help us to understand and fully comprehend the truth.

It is a curious and a wonderful fact that when any man, by his genius, good luck or otherwise, rises to public notice and to fame, it does not make much difference what life he has led, that the whole Christian world claims him as a pattern Christian, to be forever held up to view as a hero and a saint during all the coming ages, just as if religion would die out of the soul of man unless the great dead be canonized as a model Christian. This is a species of hero or saint-worship. Lincoln they are determined to enthrone among the saints, to be forever worshipped as such. We shall see what we shall see.

The most credulous and truthful minister (Mr. Reed) divides his lecture into two heads—first, the one in reference to Mr. Lincoln's legitimacy, and the second in reference to his religion. I have never discussed the question of Mr. Lincoln's legitimacy in writing, publicly or otherwise, and it is probable I never shall. I do not think it becomes me to do so, whatever may be my opinion. I feel this, and I shall obey my feeling. I should not even have said what I intend to say, but for Mr. Reed's lecture. Those who are interested in this question are referred to an elaborate and able article published in the New York World some time in August, 1873, and subsequently published in the Chicago Tribune, as I am informed. This last article was drawn forth by "C. F. B." These facts would have slumbered probably forever, had not Mr. Reed forced them out. I can discuss one thing, however, and it is this: The reverend defender boldly and positively asserts that there is "well authenticated evidence" of the marriage of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks, and that it is now to be found in the hands of Robert Lincoln; that the said record evidence, historically marked, of, thus: 1st. Dennis Hanks and [illegible]. 2d. Hanks gave it to J. C. Black. 3d. It was sent by J. C. Black, of Champaign, to Wm. P. Black, attorney at law, 131 LaSalle street, Chicago, and duly delivered by him to the Historical Association of Chicago, and that it thence passed into the hands of Robert Lincoln, son of Abraham Lincoln. I state, on my best belief, that there is no such well authenticated record showing the marriage of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks, now, or ever was, in the hands of any of those gentlemen. I saw a leaf of the Thomas Lincoln Bible, which Dennis Hanks tore out. The writing of the marriages, births and deaths was in the hand-writing of Abraham Lincoln, or mostly so, as I now remember. The record was badly worn, broken up into squares of about two inches, having been doubled up and worn out thus in the pockets of some one. I had great trouble in taking a good copy. I borrowed the record of Dennis Hanks, or Mr. Chapman, his son-in-law, and while in my possession I took a copy, and, I verily believe, a correct one. That record wholly fails to state or to record the marriage of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks. While looking over it and copying it, I was struck with astonishment at the omission to record the marriage of Thomas and Nancy, when I saw that most of the record, if not the whole of it, was in the hand-writing of Abraham Lincoln, who would have recorded the marriage, if true. I then thought that this omission was one link in the chain of evidence in favor of those who thought and argued that Mr. Lincoln was illegitimate—the child of Abraham Enlow.

Can the reverend gentleman and myself be talking about two records—different and distinct ones? There is a way of finding out the truth, thus: 1st. The record was torn from a Bible. 2d. The record is in the hand-writing of Mr. Lincoln, or mostly so. 3d. It commences or opens, as follows: "Nancy Lincoln was born February 10th, 1807," and concludes thus: "Nancy or Sarah Lincoln, daughter of Thomas Lincoln, was married to Aaron Grigsby August, 1826." I took a copy of this Bible sheet, this "well authenticated record," Sept. 1st, 1865, and now have it in my hands. I suppose these records are one and the same—identical; and if so, I aver that the reverend gentleman misrepresents the record, falsified it, for it wholly, I believe, fails to state that Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks were ever married. Let any one compare the opening and conclusion, as above given, and he will find the record one and the same. I ask the lecturer to go to Chicago and get a copy of the Bible leaf record, if any, and publish his investigations to the world. What is more astonishing, is that the said "well authenticated record" does not fail to state the marriage of Thomas Lincoln and *Sarah Bush*, [illegible]. Why not record the first marriage? Mr. Lincoln, in that record, says: "Abraham Lincoln, son of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Lincoln, was born Feb. 12th, 1809. Again he says: "Nancy Lincoln, wife of Thomas Lincoln." How is it? Did the record wholly fail to record or to state the marriage of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks—by whom, or how, when, or where—if it ever took place. Was it by "jumping the broomstick?" Was it by mutual consent and agreement between the two, somewhat after the fashion of the free-lover, without form or ceremony? The gentleman boldly asserted that there was well authenticated evidence of the marriage of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks. I aver that there is no such record. I aver, on my belief, that the gentleman mis-states the record. He affirms that which he does not know to exist, and to that extent acts fraudulently—proclaims a lie, to use his most Christian language. I wish it distinctly understood that I give no opinion of Mr. Lincoln's legitimacy, or of the marriage of Thomas and Nancy.

The second head of Mr. Reed's lecture is in reference to Mr. Lincoln's religion, and he knows just about as much of his religion, as of his birth and legitimacy—of the marriage of Thomas and Nancy. I affirm that Mr. Lincoln died an unbeliever—was not an evangelical Christian. The lecturer affirms that Lincoln was a believer in the Christian religion; was, as it were, an orthodox Christian. One side of this question can be proved; it is admitted of all hands that Mr. Lincoln once was an infidel—that he wrote a small book, or essay, or pamphlet against Christianity, and that he continued an unbeliever till late in life. It is a rule of law, as well as a rule of common sense, that when a certain state or condition of affairs is once proved to exist, the presumption is, that it still exists, that it continues, unless the contrary is proved. This rule has full force and virtue till the presumption is removed by evidence. The burden of proof, that Mr. Lincoln died a Christian—or a believer, rests on Mr. Reed, for it is admitted that late in life and before Mr. Lincoln was an infidel.

In our review of Mr. Reed's evidence let us proceed in the order of the lecturer: 1st. He gets the Hon. Jno. T. Stuart to state in a letter, addressed to himself, dated the 17th December, 1872, that he did not write the note in Lamon's life of Lincoln, at page 488. Mr. Stuart did not write the note, and no one ever said he did. What is there stated was the substance of a conversation between Mr. Stuart and myself about Mr. Lincoln's religion. I took down, in a note, in his office and in his presence his words and ideas and what he said substantially, as I did in all other cases. The conversation spoken of took place in Mr. Stuart's office, and in the east room. Mr. Stuart does not deny that the note is substantially correct as to Mr. Lincoln's earlier belief. He simply says he could not have said that Dr. Smith tried to convert Mr. Lincoln, and *couldn't do it*. I well remember that he did use this language in substance. It seemed to do him good to say it, and I was glad to hear it. I think the letter which he wrote to Mr. Reed proves that he has forgotten. There is an implied admission—say, an expression—in Mr. Stuart's letter, that he never heard of Mr. Lincoln's conversion till Mr. Edwards on the 17th day of December, 1872, or a few days before, informed him of the fact. Mr. Stuart expressly says: "I had no personal knowledge as to Mr. (Lincoln's) alleged change of opinion." My notes of Mr. Stuart's conversation with me were taken down in 1866 or '67. Here are five years or more from the time when he made his statement to me, and writing to Mr. Reed his letter of December, 1872, or till he was informed by Mr. Edwards of Mr. Lincoln's change of opinion, to the extent claimed by Dr. Smith. But more hereafter about Dr. Smith, and the extent of Mr. Lincoln's conversion to Christianity. It is quite probable that Mr. Stuart told me much about "Eddie" and Dr. Smith. What he said, which was mere hearsay, may have caused me to say what I said. It seems that Mr. Stuart had heard that Mr. Lincoln and Dr. Smith did have much discussion about Christianity, but he failed to hear of Mr. Lincoln's conversion or anything like it, and well might he say, as he did, that Dr. Smith tried to convert Mr. Lincoln, "*but couldn't do it.*" How easy, after five long years, for Mr. Stuart to forget. I say the facts, and Mr. Stuart's own letter to Mr. Reed bear me out in what I say. If Mr. Stuart did not, in substance, say what I make him say, then I committed a great wrong on Mr. Stuart and the reading world, but I affirm that Mr. Stuart did say to me what I make him say, in substance and in fact. I stand by my notes taken at the time. Mr. Stuart makes no other corrections, and impliedly admits that I reported him correctly in the note, except as stated above, and I now state he is reported correctly in the note substantially in every particular. I did not take down his hearsay, as I rejected every other person's hearsay. Truths and facts were what I was after—not hearsay.

The next gentleman introduced by Mr. Reed is Col. James H. Matheny. He is made to say, in a letter addressed to Mr. Reed, that he did not write the notes in Lamon's life of Lincoln at pages 487 and 488. I do not at present claim that he did. I wrote it in the Court House—this hall—in Mr. Matheny's presence and at his dictation—read it over to him and he approved it substantially; wrote the note all at once, as he spoke it to me; it is not made up of scraps—"a mere collection of sayings gathered from private conversations," that were true of Mr. Lincoln's earlier life. I say this note was written all at one time and place. [illegible] Let any critic, any man of common sense, any man of judgment, read it and say what he does say: "This was all written at once." I appeal to the note and words, ideas and language as to which it runs—word with word, and sentence for sentence, and idea for idea, for the proof that the note was made at one sitting. Mr. Matheny has often told me that Mr. Lincoln was an infidel; he admits this in his letter to Mr. Reed. Mr. Matheny denies nothing in this note—admits its correctness. He never intimated in that or any other conversation with me that he believed that Mr. Lincoln in his later life became a Christian. What does Mr. Matheny say in his letter to Mr. Reed to show that Mr. Lincoln in his later life became a Christian? He says: "I *believe* he was a very different man in his later life, and (after) investigating the subject he was a firm believer in the Christian religion." Notice carefully the words of Col. Matheny. He simply says he "*believes*;" he does not say he *knows*. Col. Matheny says that he believes that Mr. Lincoln in after life—late in life—became and was a firm believer in the Christian religion. I believe that Mr. Lincoln did not late in life become a firm believer in the Christian religion. What! Mr. Lincoln discard his logical faculties and reason with the heart? What! Mr. Lincoln believe that Jesus was the Christ of God, the truly and only begotten son of Him—as the Christian creed contends! What! Mr. Lincoln believe that the New Testament was and is of special divine authority, and fully and infallibly inspired, as the Christian world contends! What! Mr. Lincoln abandon his life-long ideas of universal, eternal and absolute laws, and contend that the New Testament is any more inspired than Homer's songs, than Milton's Paradise Lost, than Shakspeare, than his own eloquent and inspired oration at Gettysburg! What, in short, Mr. Lincoln believe that the great Creator had connection through the form or instrumentality of a shadow with a Jewish girl? Blasphemy! These things must be believed and acknowledged in order to be a Christian. Does Mr. Matheny know this, or does he simply mean that Mr. Lincoln became later in life more *religious* than in his younger days? As Mr. Reed says: "Moreover, he (Lincoln) could not have avowed his belief in the truth of Christianity" * * if he did not believe Jesus to be the Christ of God. If Lincoln did not believe that, he was no Christian, and he did not believe it. No man can truthfully say he did. Not even Bateman can say that, as we shall see further on.

Mr. Lamon, in his life of Lincoln, says this: "Col. Matheny alleges that from 1854 to 1860, Mr. Lincoln played a sharp game upon the Christians of Springfield, 'treading on their toes,' and saying, 'Come and convert me.'" Mr. Matheny said this to me, and he repeated the same in substance, often. How can we reconcile this sharp game with the expression as above quoted by him, that he believed that Mr. Lincoln became a firm believer in Christianity. In his expression, as above quoted, he says that Mr. Lincoln played a sharp game on the Christians from 1854 to 1860. These things appear to be irreconcilable. [illegible] To play a sharp game on the Christians is not much evidence of Christianity. But I can make Mr. Matheny consistent with facts, with truth and with himself, with all that is said in this letter, if he will only permit me; and I shall attempt it, consent or no consent. I shall take the responsibility.

I have heretofore been arguing the question in this part of the lecture as if Col. Matheny's letter to Mr. Reed expressed his ideas and views of Mr. Lincoln. But fortunately it does not. [illegible] Mr. Matheny and myself had a conversation on the 9th day of December, 1873—Tuesday of this week—about this Reed letter, and in that conversation he said to me, substantially, this: "What I mean, in my Reed letter, by Mr. Lincoln's after life, is [illegible]. What I mean by Mr. Lincoln's later life is his Washington life, [illegible]." Mr. Matheny now makes himself plain, clear and consistent with what Lamon records in his life of Lincoln, at page 487, with what Mr. Matheny has often told me, [illegible].

Again—the reverend gentleman reproduces a letter addressed to me by the Rev. James Smith, of Scotland. That letter states that Mr. Lincoln "did avow his belief in the divine authority and inspiration of the Scriptures." Theodore Parker could have said, when living, the same thing. So can I. Everything that is good is of divine authority. Every book, every sermon, every poem that rises to the eloquent, being tinged with enthusiasm, is inspired. Mr. Smith says he placed before Mr. Lincoln arguments designed to prove the divine authority and inspiration of the Scriptures. He asserts that Mr. Lincoln "examined the arguments as a lawyer who is anxious to reach the truth." Mr. Smith came to the city of Springfield, Illinois, about the year 1848. [illegible] The speech of Mr. Lincoln to the Bible Society, spoken of by Mr. Smith, was delivered about the year 1858. Mr. Smith's letter to me is dated 1867. Here are about twelve years from the time of Lincoln's speech made at the Bible Society and Mr. Smith's letter to me. [illegible] Is it not possible that he does not remember correctly? Is it not probable that Mr. Smith's prejudices make him say what he does say? I will state a fact about books and arguments on my own personal knowledge. Mr. Lincoln received a book from Dr. Smith on infidelity. He placed it on our law table. He never opened it—never read it to my knowledge, and I think the book so rested, unused and unopened, till after Mr. Lincoln's death. So much for Mr. Lincoln's sweeping and searching investigation. Let us get down to well known facts: Senator Douglas introduced his Kansas-Nebraska bill into the United States Senate in 1854; and it is but too well known in this State that Mr. Lincoln was too busily engaged on the stump and at the press, including his law business from 1854 to 1856, and from 1856 to 1858, and from 1858 to 1861, to give that sweeping and searching investigation which Dr. Smith says he gave to the subject. Lincoln's heart and mind and soul were wholly absorbed in the great question of human Freedom, then quickly and heavily pressing on him; he gave to Christianity no searching investigation. I appeal to the people of the State of Illinois for the truth, that Mr. Lincoln's heart and mind and soul were absorbed on the question of liberty from 1854 to 1861. Mr. Smith does not assert that Mr. Lincoln became a Christian—an Evangelical one; does not assert that he became a church member—a member of Smith's or other church. The reverend gentleman would have gone that length without scruple had he not known that his statement could and would be proved to be false by the records; he could spirt out generalities that mean nothing; he could have his little Christian bitterness without shame, and could be unveracious when he pleased. Mr. Smith's character for veracity and integrity were not the best in the world. He came to America an open and avowed infidel, and finding it would not pay he turned Turk or Christian, to suit his purposes. I have asked many, many members of Mr. Smith's church what Mr. Lincoln said at the Bible or Sunday School societies; the reply was: "Only some courteous, general remarks—only glittering generalities, that meant anything or nothing, according to where we stood." Does not every sane man know that if Mr. Lincoln had become a Christian—had been converted, had been convinced of the truth of the Christian religion, substantially as Dr. Smith states, if his language means anything, that such report, such charge, would not have run through the city like wildfire blown by a hurricane? Silence, secrecy and privacy on such an occasion as this would have been utterly impossible. From what I know of Dr. Smith, his veracity and integrity, I doubt the whole of his testimony. I have heard good people say: "O, Mr. Smith was a very able man, but a great old rascal." I leave the Doctor's letter and his veracity to the world.

Ninian W. Edwards is next examined. Mr. Edwards writes a note to Mr. Reed, dated the 24th day of December, 1872, some fifteen years after Mr. Lincoln made his Sunday School and Bible Society speech; or rather soon after Mr. Smith came to Springfield, which was in 1848, stating that Mr. Lincoln told him that he was convinced of the truth of the Christian religion. Fifteen years is too long a time to make this story of any value whatever, unless he had taken a note of what Mr. Lincoln said, which he does not pretend to have done. Memory is liable to forget, and the things we wish grow and develop in us—enlarge and become certain as time rolls on. But let us go further. It appears that one Noah Brooks, would-be keeper of Lincoln's conscience while in Washington, writes a letter to Mr. Reed, dated the 31st day of December, 1872. In that letter Mr. Brooks says that Mr. Lincoln told him this: "While he, Lincoln, could not fix any definite time, yet it (the change of heart) was after he came here (Washington) and," says Mr. Brooks, "I am positive that in his own mind he identified it with about the time of Willie's death." Mr. Edwards about 1848, soon after Dr. Smith came to Illinois, and Mr. Brooks about the time of "Willie's" death in Washington, in 1862. If these things be true, Mr. Lincoln changed ends often—backed up and backed down frequently. Some of these things cannot be true. Here are two men, Edwards and Brooks, who state that Mr. Lincoln's change of heart took place at different times and at different places. They state that Mr. Lincoln told them what they report. Some things are true, namely: Mr. Lincoln did not tell Mr. Edwards that he changed heart, or was convinced of the truth of the Christian in Springfield, Illinois, about 1848, or he did not tell Mr. Brooks that his change of heart took place in Washington, about 1862, when Willie died. Either one or the other of these are false, or Mr. Lincoln told both of these men what they state, and that would make Mr. Lincoln tell a lie to both. Is this last alternative an evidence of Mr. Lincoln's change of heart—a manifestation of his religious convictions? But suppose that either of these [illegible], then what? [illegible] Who is true, Lincoln or these men? Mr. Lincoln is false or they are, and let the people judge. I shall, in due time, quote Mrs. Lincoln's and Nicolay's testimony on this point, to show that neither of these men are correct.

Tom Lewis is introduced in the same way as Mr. Edwards, and what shall I say of him? All that I wish to say is, that his word adds nothing to Col. Matheny's or Mr. Stuart's testimony, and they know nothing. Mr. Matheny "believes" and Mr. Stuart has "heard." Mr. Lewis' veracity and integrity in this community need no comment. I have heard good men say they would not believe his word under any circumstances, especially so, if he was interested. I hate to state this of Tom, but if he will obtrude himself in this discussion, I cannot help but say a word in self-defense. Mr. Lincoln detested this man, I know. The idea that Mr. Lincoln would go to Tom Lewis and reveal to him his religious convictions, is to me, and to all who know Mr. Lincoln and Tom Lewis, too absurd. Tom Lewis does not know what Christianity is, theoretically nor practically; he knows better what practical Atheism is. All that Mr. Lewis says is, that Mr. Lincoln told him about the time of Eddie's death, after partly reading Dr. Smith's work, that "he had changed his mind about the Christian religion." What that change was and to what extent is not stated. This statement of Mr. Lewis is made after some twelve or fifteen years have elapsed since Mr. Lincoln told him he had changed his views of the Christian religion. The letter of Mr. Lewis to Mr. Reed was written in 1873. Eddie's death was about the year 1849. Why were not all these sayings and declarations made public during Mr. Lincoln's life? Simply because the dead cannot be interrogated.

Mr. Reed, then, and the last person about Springfield, Illinois, examines or produces a record made by the Hon. Newton Bateman. Dr. Holland, in his life of Lincoln, at page 237, makes Mr. Bateman say—quoting Mr. Lincoln's own words: "If He has a place for me (in the struggle between the North and South) and work for me, and I think He has, I believe I am ready. I am nothing but truth in everything. I know I am right, because I know that liberty is right, for Christ teaches it, *and Christ is God.*" Dr. Holland and Mr. Bateman both make Mr. Lincoln use the above language, and the Rev. Mr. Reed, in Scribner for 1873, quotes the language with approval, in order to show that Mr. Lincoln believed that Jesus was the Christ of God—His only begotten son. I know this statement to be false, and I therefore wish to state what *I know* about this matter. Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Bateman scarcely knew one another in 1859–60. It happened that in 1859 Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Bateman occupied adjoining rooms in the State House, the Capitol building. Some of the friends of Mr. Lincoln had made him out a small book containing a list of the voters of Springfield, and how they intended to vote, etc. One day Mr. Lincoln wanted to show the inconsistency of such Christians as —— and others, who intended to vote for the slavery ticket, called to Mr. Bateman (he then being at the head of the School Department for the State of Illinois), thus: "Come here, Mr. School Master." Mr. Lincoln then read over the list of voters, and no doubt that he became indignant, or, if you please, eloquent, in his manly denunciations of the present status of Christianity, or the so-called Christian pulpit and ministers. Now the idea that Mr. Lincoln would call in a mere stranger—"Come here, Mr. School Master"—and reveal to him his religious views, which he withheld from his nearest, oldest, best friends, is to me ridiculous—utterly absurd and unworthy of belief. Mr. Lincoln only called Mr. Bateman into his private rooms to denounce the Christians who were going to vote for the slavery ticket, and why give his own religious views? It was not called for or necessary. Mr. Bateman says that in that conversation Mr. Lincoln said, "I am not a Christian." As soon as Mr. Holland's life of Lincoln appeared, I went in search of Mr. Bateman and found him in his office. He and I had several good-natured conversations over this matter. My notes of our conversations bear date December 3d, 12th and 28th, 1865. Our conversations were private, I suppose. However, I can say this much: That Mr. Bateman expressly told me Mr. Lincoln was, in the conversations related in Holland, talking *politics* and not religion, nor Christianity, nor morals, as such. I have persistently, since 1865, dogged Mr. Bateman for the privilege of publishing my notes, or to give me a letter explaining what Mr. Lincoln did say, so that I might make known the facts of the case. Mr. Bateman as stoutly refused as I was persistent in my applications. Mr. Bateman, however, wrote me a letter, dated March 8th, 1867, but marked it confidential. This letter will tolerably well answer for my notes. Here things rested for six years, till the Rev. James A. Reed's unfortunate and foolish, not to say insane, lecture roused up men to a renewed discussion of Mr. Lincoln's legitimacy, as well as his religion. The lecture will be found in Scribner. This lecture roused me, and I again wrote to Mr. Bateman, on the 20th of July, 1873, for the former privilege or request. He remained silent. Again, about the 3d day of August, 1873, I wrote to Mr. Bateman asking, among other things, the privilege spoken of before, or to give me a letter to make public, or to let me publish his letter to me of the 8th of March. I sent him a copy of his letter; he answered me by letter dated the 13th of August, 1873, that he had *forgotten* the letter, a copy of which I had sent him; or, to use Mr. Bateman's own words, "I had forgotten the letter to you, of which you have sent me a copy, dated the 7th March, 1867, and you have my permission to publish it." Mr. Bateman, after six years, had wholly forgotten this letter, and honestly, too. How easy and natural for Messrs. Matheny and Stuart to forget after a longer time. Records stand. Memory often fails, and honestly so with Mr. Bateman, Col. Matheny and Mr. Stuart, as I verily believe. Sometime in August, 1873, Mr. Bateman and I had a very friendly conversation over this subject matter, and in that conversation Mr. Bateman expressly told me that the accounts of Mr. Lincoln's conversation with Mr. Bateman, as related in Holland, *is colored*.

I now and here give a copy of Mr. Bateman's letter to me, dated the 8th March, 1867:

"SPRINGFIELD, ILL., March 7, 1867.

"I have yours of the 7th instant. I am too unwell and too busy to write or think, to-day—will try to speak of the subject of your note when I can. My aversion to publicity in such matters is intense. The tone, manner, &c., of Mr. Lincoln was deeply, solemnly religious; it inspired me with awe. He was APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES of moral and religious truth to the duties of the hour, the condition of the country, and the conduct of public men—ministers of the Gospel. I HAD NO THOUGHT of orthodoxy or heterodoxy, Unitarianism, Trinitarianism or any other ism, during the whole conversation, and I DON'T SUPPOSE OR BELIEVE HE (Lincoln) HAD. The room was full of God and high truths, and the awfulness of coming events. Sects and dogmas in such a presence! He was alone with the great God and the great problem of his country's future and his own, and I but heard the communings of his soul.

"Yours truly,

"NEWTON BATEMAN.

"Hon. W. H. HERNDON."

This letter shows that Mr. Lincoln was talking politics—*applying* the principles of moral and religious truth to the condition of the country, ministers of the Gospel. Mr. Lincoln was not making Mr. Bateman his confessor; was not giving his views of Christianity to Mr. Bateman. The talk was over the little book containing a list of the voters of the city of Springfield, and it would have been a sudden, wide and deep-astonishing departure for Mr. Lincoln to state his views of religion. If Holland's account is true, books changed quickly from a list of voters to the New Testament, "which Mr. Lincoln took out of his bosom." But Mr. Bateman says he had no thought of orthodoxy, &c., during the whole conversation, and, says he, "I don't suppose or believe he (Lincoln) had." Mr. Lincoln was not even thinking about Christianity, and how express his ideas about it, and why do so, as related by Holland's fictitious and romantic life of Lincoln! The truth is, that Mr. Lincoln is misrepresented; the account *colored*. Lincoln never said *Christ is God*, and Mr. Bateman's letter, I think, settles that question forever. To use Bateman's language, Holland's account of Lincoln and Bateman's conversation "*is colored.*" Yes! colored, highly colored and stiffly starched. This letter of Mr. Bateman shows clearly that the account of Mr. Lincoln's religious views, &c., as reported in Holland, is colored, is false.

I promised the reading world—said to it in the Abbott letter, dated 1870—that if I could but get the seal of secrecy or privacy removed from Mr. Bateman's conversation with me (Dec. 3d, 12th and 28th, 1865), I could and would prove Holland's account of Lincoln's religious views and declarations untrue—false. The privacy has been removed by the written consent of Mr. Bateman, and I think I have fulfilled my promise to the letter; I feel that I have redeemed my word. I consider this a fixed fact, soon to go into history, never to be substantially contradicted nor denied. Such falsehoods as those contained in Holland, can only live by sufferance.

It is said by Mr. Brooks (somehow connected with the New York Tribune) that Mr. Lincoln told him that his change of heart took place in Washington, about the time of Willie's death. I now wish to introduce a witness whose testimony no one will even doubt. He shared, next to Mr. Lincoln's wife, in nearness, privacy and dearness. The man is John G. Nicolay, Lincoln's private secretary, a keen observer and a shrewd man. Mr. Nicolay is not only made to say, to use the words of Mr. Reed, but he does say, "But I am very sure he (Lincoln) gave no *outward* indications of his mind having undergone any change in that regard, while here." I will, however, give the letter in full, to ease the mind of Mr. Reed. The letter reads thus:

"EXECUTIVE MANSION,
"WASHINGTON, May 27th, 1865.

"FRIEND HERNDON: I have this morning received your note of the 73d inst., and with great pleasure answer it at once.

"Mr. Lincoln did not, to my knowledge, in any way, change his religious ideas, opinions or beliefs from the time he left Springfield to the day of his death. I do not know just what they were, never having heard him explain them in detail; but I am very sure he gave no outward indications of his mind having undergone any change in that regard while here.

"Yours truly,
"JNO. G. NICOLAY.

"Hon. W. H. HERNDON."

If any man ought to know Mr. Lincoln's religious views, or rather their change while in Washington, Mr. Nicolay is that man. Mr. Lincoln loved Nicolay—trusted him. Nicolay was a close observer, and he would have discovered Lincoln's change, if any. Lincoln would have told him of the change.

But I promised to introduce the evidence of Mrs. Lincoln to show that neither Dr. Smith, nor Mr. Edwards, nor Mr. Brooks was correct in what they state about Mr. Lincoln's change of views. It will be presumed—will be admitted by all men that the bosom companion—the wife of Mr. Lincoln, should know the secrets of his soul; that husband and wife do reveal—do tell to each other every thing that touches their feelings or interest. I examined Mrs. Lincoln at the St. Nicholas Hotel, in Springfield, Illinois, some time after the death of Mr. Lincoln, touching, among other things, Mr. Lincoln's supposed change of heart. She gave me a short history of herself at my special request—some account of the customs at the White House—something about Seward, Johnson, Sumner, etc., etc. I hope she will not, like Matheny, Stuart and Bateman, forget. Among other things, Mrs. Lincoln substantially said to me:

"Mr. Lincoln had no hope and no faith in the usual acceptation of these words, and Lincoln's maxim and philosophy were: 'What is to be will be, and no cares (prayers) of ours can arrest the decree.' Mr. Lincoln never joined any church. He was a religious man always, as I think. He *first thought*—to say think—about this subject was when Willie died—*never before*; he read the Bible a good deal about 1864. He felt *religious*, more than ever before, about the time he went to Gettysburg. Mr. Lincoln was not a technical Christian. * * * I told him about Seward's intention. He said in reply: "I shall rule myself—*shall obey my own conscience and follow God in it*," etc.

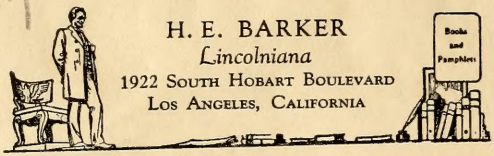
Here is the wife of Mr. Lincoln who declares that Mr. Lincoln never thought of the subject of Christianity in Springfield; she draws the clear distinction between *Religion* and *Christianity*. My knowledge of Mr. Lincoln, and the facts of Mr. Lincoln's life in Springfield, well bear her out. Mrs. Lincoln is a close observer, a woman of intellect, a good judge of human nature and knew her husband thoroughly inside and outside. Mr. Lincoln's maxim and philosophy were: "What is to be will be, and *no prayers* of ours can arrest the decree." And if this is—taking Mrs. Lincoln's words as true—what becomes of the Christian idea of prayer? What becomes of Noah Brooks' cant and twaddle about Lincoln's praying? What becomes of Dr. Smith's idea of Mr. Lincoln's sweeping and searching research, and the conviction springing therefrom of the divine authority and inspiration of the Scriptures? What becomes of Mr. Edwards' evidence that Mr. Lincoln, in Springfield, was convinced of the truth of the Christian religion; and, in short, what becomes of all the cant and twaddle about Mr. Lincoln's Christianity?

I have now reviewed the evidences of the Rev. James A. Reed, and I think I have done so fairly. The whole weight of the evidence, including what Reed, Holland and Lamon adduce and bring forward, is in favor of the idea that Mr. Lincoln died an unbeliever—in favor of his continued infidelity.

What I say in this lecture is only intended to cover Mr. Lincoln's life in Illinois, though I could not help adducing Mr. Nicolay and Mrs. Lincoln. I do not mean to trench upon the grounds of another. Let us wait patiently on events, watch for the unfolding and development of facts in the future.

One word concerning this discussion about Mr. Lincoln's Christian views. It is important in this: 1st. It settles a historic fact. 2d. It makes it possible to write a true history of a man free from the fear of fire and stake. 3d. It assures the reading world that the life of Mr. Lincoln will be truly written. 4th. It will be a warning forever to all untrue men, that the life they have lived will be dragged out to public view. 5th. It should convince the Christian pulpit and press that it is impossible in this day and generation, at least in America, to daub up Sin, and make a hero out of a fool, a knave or a villain, which Mr. Lincoln was not. Some true spirit will drag the fraud and lie out to the light of day. 6th. Its tendencies will be to arrest and put a stop to romantic biographies, and now let it be written in history and on Mr. Lincoln's tomb—"He died an unbeliever."

For autograph of Herndon Miller see inside green cover.



H. E. BARKER
Lincolniana
1922 South Hobart Boulevard
Los Angeles, California

Nov 12, 1937

William H. Townsend
Lexington Bank Bldg.
Lexington, Ky.

Dear Mr Townsend:

Your letter of Nov. 3rd is received. I am wondering if your copy of the original broadside of Herndon's lecture on Lincoln's religion is the one I sold to DeWitt Miller – if my memory serves me correctly, it was to that gentleman I sold my second copy, and never since that time have I seen another. My first copy, sold to Maj. Lambert, unfortunately had been cut up into separate columns, but the second copy was in perfect state.

For about twenty-five years after disposing of this copy to Mr. Miller, I remained in business in Springfield, Ills., during which time much rare Lincolniana passed through my hands, but this Herndon broadside except for these two copies discovered by me nearly forty years ago, seems to have completely and forever disappeared.

With congratulations on acquiring one of the rarest items of Lincolniana, I am,

Sincerely
H. E. Barker

This copy of Herndon's lecture on Religion of Abraham Lincoln was obtained from J. B. Fossellman, in whose possession it had been since publication. One other copy of the same lecture I obtained from J. S. Condell, who was present when "lecture was delivered" to less than three dozen persons" in the old Sangamon Co. Court-house on east side square, Springfield Ill. That copy was sold by me (ten dollars) to Wm E Lambert of Phila. Pa. for 10. These two copies are all I have found of this lecture - its rarity no doubt being due to the perishable form in which it was published

H E Barker

Springfield Ills.

Aug 16-07

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